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Christian Community

A Program Service of the Council for Social Action of the Congregational Christian Churches, 289 Fourth Ave., New York 10, N. Y., and the Commission on Christian Social Action of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, 2969 West 25th St., Cleveland 13, Ohio

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OUR CHURCHES AND THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By Erwin L. Shaver

In the tri-lateral area of church, state and education there are many problems, a number of which are becoming increasingly pressing, and toward a solution of which we must work earnestly and honestly. It is the purpose of this short statement only to suggest some of the ways in which our churches may serve, and in turn be served by our American public schools.

Protestantism in general and particularly the churches of the congregational type have a triple stake in the public school system. Historically our churches were the founders, not only of the common schools but of the great majority of the early American colleges. Of the wisdom of the founding fathers in these pioneering projects we can be justly proud. In the hundred years since the public school of the present-day type came into being through the leadership of Horace Mann, the advances made have been due largely to the wholehearted backing and support of Protestants. We therefore have a heavy investment in the public schools, an investment which we confidently believe has paid splendid returns, and which we are bound to protect. The churches which reflect the true Protestant spirit and emphasize personal religious experience, have an undeniable kinship with a democratic form of government and a democratic school system. The weakening of either institution—Protestantism or the public school—will inevitably tend to weaken the other. For these and other reasons, our churches must be concerned and be "up and doing" in these critical days.

How Our Churches May Serve

How can our churches fulfill their obligations to the public schools in these times? Here are a few suggestions:

1. The Protestant churches can give the public school system their moral support in many ways. They can keep informed on the purposes, the program and the needs of the schools. Their members can work as individuals in electing school boards and deciding im-

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portant issues and through their membership in parent-teacher associations. They can show their interest in various teachers' organizations, conferences and conventions. Churches can, from time to time, express in sermons, in worship services and at particular occasions, such as American Education Week, appreciation of what the public school means to church and community.

2. Protestants can help increase the financial support given to public schools, especially so in their present need. They should become familiar with the details of the various "federal aid" bills before Congress, as well as on similar proposals for state and local school assistance. This requires careful and objective study. for the problems involved are not simple. It is of more import than is usually recognized that every effort be made to increase local appropriations for public schools before expecting help from outside, lest the very democracy we seek to preserve be destroyed at the grass roots. It is here as well as in Congress that our churches and their members can make their views effective.

3. Let no reader gain the impression that we are advocating any form of control of the public schools by our churches. On the contrary they must definitely avoid even the appearance of such an attitude. Further, they must likewise oppose any other groups which encroach upon the schools with the purpose of self-interest, whether religious, commercial or "patriotic." It is not easy to draw the line between interest in and support of public schools on the one hand and dominance on the other, but it must be done, carefully and in accord with our democratic principles.

4. Our churches should be discouraged from establishing private and parochial schools on any significant scale. We will jealously guard the right of such schools to exist, because we believe in the freedom of religion. Past experience has shown that there are times and situations where a limited number of such schools can serve needs unmet by the public school. But with these few exceptions, owing as we do so much to the common school and mindful of its contributions to democracy, our churches should not be tempted to set up church-sponsored all day schools.

5. Our churches can render the public school system very great assistance, particularly at the present time, by encouraging our finest young people to enter public school teaching as a vocation distinctly Christian and one which offers splendid opportunities for service. Both the great dearth of qualified teachers and the danger of "professionalism" in teaching demand that more Protestant youth enter public school work with the service motive.

6. Our churches can insist upon academic freedom for the members of the public teaching profession. In a democratic school system it is highly important that teaching be freed from the petty and often tyrannical pressures that make true teaching impossible. There is something in the nature of teaching, as in science and in religion, which makes the method of authoritarian dictation an inconsistency Our churches, in the very character of their democratic profession, will stand for the rights of the true teacher, even though they may disagree with some of his political, economic, or other ideas.

7. At the same time, our churches should seek in every way to foster that type of teaching method which is truly democratic as contrasted with authoritarianism. True teaching must be scientific, objective, thought-provoking, and free in its approach. Too much teaching has been conducted on a basis which tends to weaken the democracy which the public school in particular is expected to strengthen. Let our church members see that democratically minded public school teachers are chosen and are encouraged to do this finer type of teaching.

8. The churches which we represent, stressing the freedom of the local unit as contrasted with a highly centralized ecclesiastical government, should take the lead in preserving both the freedom and the sense of responsibility of the local public school system. Only as grass roots interest, pride, support, and creativity are watered will the kind of democratic society, religious and governmental alike, for which our churches stand, be preserved and strengthened.

What Our Churches May Expect

In return for those kinds of service which our churches are by their nature and their historic obligations bound to render to our public schools, there are certain expectations which they may hold with reference to these schools. Among such hopes are these:

1. Our churches have a right to expect that our public school teachers shall be religiously minded persons, teachers who themselves have a sincere and deep religious experience and who reveal that experience in their personal lives. This does not mean that they must be sectarian, unless to be religious is to be sectarian. Our government, and therefore our public schools, have always encouraged religion and not to do so now would be a disavowal of its founding purpose and its historic character.

2. It can also be expected that public school teachers will show respect for religion and for religions. In certain areas of study, particularly in the physical sciences, there has been a tendency for some teachers to speak disparagingly of religion. Such teachers have not only discredited religion; they have also discredited truly democratic teaching.

3. Our churches, in the opinion of this writer and others, have the right to expect that our public schools disavow materialistic, secularistic and humanistic views of education and teach "belief in God as the Source of all spiritual values and material goods, the Determiner of the destinies of nations, and the loving Father of mankind . . We expect that the schools will expose our children to this point of view. We go further in our expectations. As far as the school can, in view of the religious diversity of our people, judicial opinions, and our American traditions, we expect it to teach this common religious tradition as the only adequate basis for the life of the school and the personal lives of teachers, students and citizens in a free and responsible democracy." (Report of the Committee on Religion and Education, International Council of Religious Education).

4. In furtherance of this point of view, our churches may well expect that public school teachers will make generous use of the materials of religion in enriching the various subjects and activities in the public school program. Not to do so, would, in the words of Mr. Justice Jackson, in his opinion in the McCollum case, "leave the student wholly ignorant of the currents of religious thought that move the world society for a part in which he is being prepared."

5. Our churches have a right and an obligation to insist that the public school program shall not so dominate the child's time as to leave the churches and other worthy community agencies with whatever time is "left-over" or "marginal." In view of pronouncements by outstanding public school leaders and organizations, advocating the six-day school week and the twelve-month school year, taking left-over time will sooner or later leave the churches with practically no reasonably good time in which to conduct their educational or other activities. This may encourage more church groups to establish parochial schools. We believe that weekday religious education on school (not *public* school) time and other workable arrangements are demonstrated alternatives to either of the two extremes mentioned.

6. Our churches have a reasonable expectation that our public schools as systems and our public school leaders as individuals should reciprocate by supporting church programs of religious education. Obviously, there are limits set to this expectation in view of the religious diversity of our communities and of the beliefs of the public school workers. But we can expect that Protestant public school teachers will assist in the various local church programs in the light of their special talents and interests.

Current Issues

May we suggest in conclusion that our churches have a vital stake in several current national issues and that they may further serve our public schools and be true to their own democratic traditions by taking these stands:

1. Giving full backing to such plans for federal aid to education as will not assist private or parochial schools.

2. Insisting, as Mrs. Roosevelt and others have indicated, that welfare services to all children be administered entirely apart from the public and other school systems. This can and should be done through public welfare departments and thereby make a clear cut separation between aid of a welfare character to children and aid to educational institutions.

3. Taking a stand against any direct governmental aid to church colleges. We would thus be consistent at the higher education level with our policies with regard to such aid at the primary and secondary levels. This would not prevent aid to individual students irrespective of the schools in which they might enroll.

4. Giving definite support to weekday religious education conducted under church control, in church buildings, without the use of public school "machinery," but within the time allotted for education.

Thus — as in the beginning and throughout the years — we believe our churches may continue to render constructive service to the public schools of America.

A BRIEF READING LIST

The Relation of Religion to Public Education, Basic Principles. A statement issued by The American Council on Education, Washington, D. C. $1.00.

Report of the Committee on Religion and Public Education. The International Council of Religious Education, 206 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago 4, Illinois. $ .15.

Shaver, Erwin L. *Religion and Publce Education* ($ .05) and *Trends in Weekday Religious Education* ($ .10). Obtainable from the writer, 14 Beacon Street, Boston 8, Massachusetts.

Higher Education for American Democracy. Report of the President's Commission on Higher Education. Harper and Brothers. $3.75.

Williams, H. Paul. *The New Education and Religion.* Association Press. $2.50.

Harner, Nevin C. *Religion's Place in General Education.* John Knox Press. $2.50.

Write also to the following for pamphlet and other materials bearing on this subject: Council for Social Action, Congregational Christian Churches, 289 Fourth Avenue, New York 10, N. Y. Commission on Christian Social Action, Evangelical and Reformed Church, 2969 West 25th Street, Cleveland 13, Ohio; International Council of Religious Education, 206 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago 4, Illinois; National Education Association, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D. C.

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

1. Why is religion not taught in the public schools in the same manner and degree as it was in the earlier days of America?

2. In what ways does religion now find expression in your local public schools or in some relationship to them?

3. Which of the ways suggested in the article for churches to serve the public schools can be carried out in your community? Which cannot?

4. Do you agree or disagree with the various "expectations" given in the central section of the article?

5. Does your group accept the writer's points of view with respect to the four proposals under the heading, "Current Issues?" If not, what stand would your group take?

6. The following question may be answered by a person who has read any of the documents included in the reading list: "What do you think of the points of view and the proposals given in the document?"

PROGRAM SUGGESTIONS

A program on the subject may be arranged for local church or other social action committees, men's or women's groups, Bible classes, etc. The article may be reviewed or read and reports may be given by those who have done advance reading. (See Question 6 above).

Some groups may wish to have a special speaker—minister or layman, a public school leader, or a person particularly informed on the subject.

A portion of the meeting should be given to discussion of the foregoing and other questions, to personal experiences and convictions, and particularly to discovering what should and can be done locally.

Outcome projects may be such as these:

(a) A study of local public school needs and the relation of our churches to these needs.

(b) Development of a high level program of weekday religious education, or the improvement of an existing one.

(c) Development of the type of program for enriching the public school program with religion recommended in the statement of the American Council on Education listed above.

(d) Enlisting other churches and civic welfare organizations in a community-wide cooperative endeavor to meet the needs revealed in this discussion.

(e) Appointment of a committee to carry forward the study which has been begun and to keep the churches informed of significant development in this area, both national and local.

The Reverend Erwin L. Shaver is secretary of the Department of Leadership Education of the Division of Christian Education of the Board of Home Missions of the Congregational Christian Churches.

The Commission on Church, State, and Education of the Congregational Christian Churches and the Commission on Christian Social Action of the Evangelical and Reformed Church ask your cooperation in securing the names of both public and private school administrators who are affiliated with our churches and interested in the subject of this issue of *Christian Community.*

Church and Economic Life Week, at the initiative of the Federal Council of Churches' Department of the Church and Economic Life, will again be observed January 15 to 21. A suggested Order of Worship and other materials may be secured from the Department, 297 Fourth Avenue, New York 10, New York.

BUFFALO PASTORS ACT IN STRIKE

By John F. Steve

In the industrial city of Buffalo, the strike between the Bell Aircraft Corporation and its production workers of Local 501 UAW-CIO is now in its 19th week. The tension at the strike-bound plant last week reached dangerous proportions as a result of numerous outbreaks of violence and arrests. The strikers announced a "D" day on which striking steelworkers were expected to assist in the picketing. Public opinion also arose to a high tension because the strike involves at least 1700 workers from the Buffalo area.

Realizing the tension and an adamant situation, about 20 clergy of the Buffalo area met with a national representative of the CIO in closed session and the following evening met with the vice-president of Bell Aircraft Corporation in charge of negotiations. A third meeting, called by the clergy without the presence of union or management representatives, formulated the following telegram which was sent to the union, management and the two local newspapers:

In view of the dangerous tension among us, we, the undersigned ministers of the Gospel, appreciate the establishment of the State Board of Inquiry to investigate the differences existing between the Bell Aircraft Corporation and Local 501, UAW-CIO. We appreciate the acquiescence of both parties to the request of Industrial Commissioner Edward Corsi "to refrain from engaging in any practice which would complicate or further disturb the situation."

From our understanding of union men, we believe that they consider the practice of hiring new production workers a practice that complicates and further disturbs the situation. Therefore we sincerely request the Bell Aircraft Corporation to abstain from the hiring of such workers pending the settlement of the strike.

We do not attempt to assess the legal rights involved. However, we are convinced that an amicable and equitable ending of the strike would be facilitated by mutual adherence to the public commitments made to Mr. Corsi.

This telegram was signed by 31 clergy of Buffalo representing the Evangelical and Reformed, Congregational - Christian, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Universalist denominations.

After the telegram was sent, several clergy observed the picketing at the plant and the newspapers reported that "spectators" were amongst the strikers across the street from the plant, but not engaged in active picketing. The clergy made several visits to the scene of the strike during the early morning hours when employees were entering the plant and also talked with the strikers about their problems.

On the designated "D" day at 8 a. m. Rev. Alan B. Peabody of Salem E. and R. Church (Riverside), the Rev. Paul Strauch, Grace E. and R. Church (Parkridge) and the Rev. Albert K. Herling, Unitarian minister and Assistant National Secretary of the Workers Defense League conducted a brief worship service across the street from the picket line. The service was broadcast on a speaker system provided by the union. The strikers were appreciative of the service but there was adverse criticism from the strikebreakers and a minority of non-striking employees who heard the service while crossing the picket line to enter the plant.

There is no doubt in the writer's mind that the clergy through these limited procedures—1) meeting with union representatives; 2) meeting with management; 3) formulating and sending the above telegram; 4) having fellowship with the strikers, with a desire to understand them and to understood; and 5) conducting the worship service—made a valuable contribution toward preventing further violence at the strike-bound plant.

The Reverend John F. Steve, Pastor of Emanuel Evangelical and Reformed Church, Buffalo, is Chairman of the Committee on Christian Social Action of West New York Synod.

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Requests for regular mailings or additional copies for Congregational Christians should be addressed to Ray Gibbons, Director, Council for Social Action, 289 Fourth Avenue, New York 10, New York. Requests by Evangelical and Reformed, and others, as well as news items and communications, should be addressed to the Editor, Huber F. Klemme, Commission on Christian Social Action, 2969 West 25th Street, Cleveland 13, Ohio.

Leads State Fight for Schools

"Maine is Asleep! Wake up, Maine!" is the heading for a two-page mimeographed cry for action by *Marion E. Cole* (Mrs. J. T.) of Kennebunk, Maine. Is she stirred up? She finds that Delaware spends more for schools than any other expenditure but that only 14% of Maine's budget is for education. Actually, the state aid in 1949 is 12.5c per pupil *less* than in 1948. "Write to Governor Payne urging him to recall the Legislature," she demands. "Meet your neighbors to decide how to improve your schools this fall. Enlist the aid of your school's Social Science classes and community groups. Contact the National Citizens Commission for the Public Schools (Office at 2 West 45th Street, New York City). Ask your Chamber of Commerce for *Which Way Education?* Can the children wait another two years for another legislature to meet this crisis in Maine?"

Mrs. Cole means business. She got her pastor to mimeograph plenty of copies. She sent a batch with the chairman of the state social action committee to be distributed at the Ocean Park meeting. She expects to distribute more at the County Conference. Best of all, she has stirred up business men of the state. "I am happy to say that our local Chamber of Commerce is meeting tomorrow and appointing an Education Committee to study the schools. It must be done all over the country. For unless we have the interest and aid of business men, we are simply wasting our time."

Frankly, we are not worried about your wasting any time, Mrs. Cole. The children of today and the adults of tomorrow will be eternally grateful for what one woman is doing in her community and state.

World Alliance to Meet

The thirty-fourth meeting of the World Alliance for International Friendship Through Religion, to be held at the Virginia Hotel, Columbus, Ohio, November 20 to 22, will have as its theme, "World Faith For World Peace." Among the speakers and discussion leaders will be Mr. Clark Eichelberger and Dr. Ralph W. Sockman.

Advance registrations may be sent to the office of the Alliance at 170 East 64th Street, New York 21, New York.